



NEWS VIDEO PEOPLE VOICES SPORT TECH LIFE PROPERTY ARTS + ENTS TRAVEL MONEY INDYBEST STUDENT OFFERS

News & Advice / Simon Calder / 48 Hours In / Africa / [Americas](#) / Asia / Australasia & Pacific / Europe / Middle East / UK / Hotels / Skiing v / Video / Travel Offers v

Travel > Americas

Search The Independent

It's not just about shopping and skyscrapers – for outdoor adventures and brilliant fall foliage, right now is a great time to visit the bigger, greener apple, says James Litston

[James Litston](#)

Thursday 30 October 2014

New York State: Traveller's Guide



New York, New York. So good, goes the song, they named it twice. And with good reason; for although its headline attractions stretch from Macy's, museums and the Empire State Building to the Brooklyn Bridge, Broadway and Lady Liberty herself, the city that never sleeps only occupies a fragment of the state.

Long Island

Stretching 118 miles from the borough of Brooklyn to Montauk Point, Long Island is anchored in city and seaside. Barrier islands front the Atlantic: some are protected zones ideal for picnics, swimming and windswept walks; others are buzzing resorts.

Among the latter, Fire Island stands out for its bohemian flair and spirited gay scene. But Long Island's most celebrated resorts are The Hamptons, a string of oceanfront villages where New York society summers in style.

East Hampton, with its bars, boutiques and see-and-be-seen vibe is arguably the chicest spot. Parking can be difficult, so it's best to come by bus (from \$25/£15 one-way; hamptonjitney.com)

or train (from \$20/£12 one-way, mta.info/lirr) and rent a bicycle for getting around. Or stay at The Maidstone (001 631 324 5006; themairstone.com), a Scandinavian-inspired boutique retreat, and you can borrow a bike free of charge. Rooms cost from \$263 (£164) per night, including breakfast.

Beyond, to the north (hence the "up" in upstate) lies a vast territory bordered by Canada, New England and the mighty Great Lakes. Spanning forests, farms and mountain preserves, it's the bigger, greener apple. While first-time visitors rarely stray much beyond Manhattan, New York State's wider appeal lures second- and third-timers to mix urban and outdoor environments. How best to convey the sheer scale of New York State and its great outdoors? Well, the state is bigger than England – and its mightiest park, Adirondack, is larger than Wales. Once you break free of NYC, you find a green and exceptionally pleasant land – which is also becoming a hub for conservation and preservation of wildlife.

The state divides itself into 11 regions, of which the closest – Long Island and Hudson Valley – are ideal for a brief escape. The Hudson River rises in the Adirondacks and flows south to the Atlantic via New York City.

On its way, the river cuts through a valley so captivating that it inspired its own artistic movement, the Hudson River School of the mid-1800s. The group's definitive, romanticised landscapes can be viewed at galleries in Cooperstown, Poughkeepsie and elsewhere in the valley, as well as NYC's Metropolitan Museum of Art (metmuseum.org). Glorious valley views can be had on Poughkeepsie's Walkway Over The Hudson (walkway.org), a mile-long former railway span revived as the world's longest elevated footbridge (with links to further trails). The main rail route from New York City's Penn Station (amtrak.com) follows the Hudson Valley north. Manhattan to Poughkeepsie, takes only 90 minutes and costs as little as \$25 (£15) one way. One railroad branch continues north to Montreal. The full, scenic journey takes 11 hours (from \$67/£40, one-way). The other loops west towards Buffalo and Niagara Falls, with trains continuing to Toronto or Chicago.

Further north, the Catskills are a hit with weekend New Yorkers, while the rest is best explored on a multi-day, self-drive trip.

The state's vast expanse of uplands, lowlands, historic towns, wineries and Atlantic and lakefront shores make for endless recreational options. For outdoor enthusiasts, there's hiking, biking and white-water rafting (plus skiing and snow-shoeing in winter), or kayaking and boating on the waterways. Urbanites might prefer galleries, outlet malls and farm-to-table dining, or the seaside scene in Fire Island or the upmarket Hamptons. And there's Niagara Falls, New York State's signature sight, where walking trails and boat rides take you right into the spray.

Although it holds year-round appeal, autumn is arguably the best time to visit. Much of upstate New York is wooded, and right now sees "fall foliage" at its peak. The maples are the first to turn and put on the best display, followed by oak, ash and hickory, and the stately American beech. The result is a patchwork of blazing colour; the Adirondacks and Catskills hold the largest tracts of forest, so head here to catch the scenery at its glorious, seasonal best. October is also the perfect time to encounter the king of fish. The aptly-named Salmon River, in the Thousand Islands Seaway region, is considered the fishing capital of the American north-east. Chinook and Coho salmon are the target species here, with the "run" of fish surging upstream to spawn reaching its climax mid-month.

Bear in mind that upstate hotel rates tend to be lowest on weekdays, when New York City prices can often be sky high. Conversely, the city is cheapest at weekends, so time your trip accordingly to make the most of your budget.

Lake land

If there's one thing New York State isn't short of, it's water. Flanked by two of the Great Lakes (Ontario and Erie) and home to countless others, there's an abundance of aquatic activities to enjoy. Beyond fishing, boating and kayaking, there are leisurely cruises on Lake George, the "Queen of American Lakes" (lakegeorgesteamboat.com) and sailing on the 125-mile-long Lake Champlain. In the scenic Finger Lakes, however, the main appeal is on land. This is New York's best wine country, awash with tasting opportunities. There are several wine trails to follow, such as America's first, the Cayuga Lake Wine Trail (cayugawinetrail.com), which takes in 17 boutique wineries and four distilleries alongside small scale mead- and cider-makers.

Audley (01993 838 755; audleytravel.com) suggests a 12-night New York State Discovered fly-drive combining NYC with the Finger Lakes and Niagara Falls. From £2,210pp, including flights, car hire and accommodation.

High adventure

The Catskills are New York City's playground, offering open space filled with family attractions and outdoor adventures. This was also where the world's first permanent snow-making facilities were installed, in 1952.

The Adirondacks are larger still. The mountain resort of Lake Placid has hosted two Winter Olympic Games – in 1932 and 1980. Find out more at the Olympic Museum (whitefacelakeplacid.com). Skiing and snowboarding are on offer in many locations, with Gore Mountain claiming the most terrain in New York State (goremountain.com).

For a genuine away-from-it-all break, head to [Garnet Hill](http://Garnet Hill Lodge) Lodge (001 518 251 2444; garnet-hill.com), near the village of North River. This cosy, family run hotel has just 16 rooms in a hilltop log cabin with far-reaching views over forest and lake. Chipmunks, deer and wild turkeys are frequent visitors to the garden, and it's even accessible by train (via Saratoga Springs) for those who don't want to drive. Rooms from \$195 (£114), including breakfast.

At just 35 miles long, the Niagara River may not be among the world's longest, but its waterfall is of global renown. Niagara Falls is actually a collection of cataracts – Horse-shoe, Bridal Veil and American Falls – shared between Canada and New York.

Grand American Adventures (0333 999 7961; grandamericanadventures.com) has a three-day coach tour departing from Newark for £375pp, including a guide, accommodation and boat trip. Post-falls, the Niagara empties into Lake Ontario, which itself is drained by the St Lawrence River through the Thousand Islands Seaway. This was the destination of choice for well-heeled, Edwardian-era New Yorkers, and its laid-back appeal prevails to this day. Waterfront Clayton makes an ideal base for kayaking through the archipelago or biking around Wellesley Island State Park. Also, don't miss the outstanding cuisine at Bella's (001 315 686 2341, bellasonlinenow.com), a restaurant that is big on local flavours.

Capital country

New York City is not the state capital. That title goes to Albany, which lies in the Hudson Valley, 135 miles north of NYC. One of the oldest surviving settlements from the original British colonies, Albany became a manufacturing hub, with goods transported on the Hudson River and Erie Canal. Today, the canal is a popular attraction, drawing cyclists to ride the 365-mile Erie Canalway Trail (eriecanalway.org) and less energetic types to interpretive boat tours. The rail journey from Manhattan takes two hours, 30 minutes, for a fare of \$41 (£26).

The wider region is also known for the genteel spa town of Saratoga Springs, which has a charming Downtown and a Performing Arts Center with a roster of high-profile acts.

America As You Like It (020 8742 8299; americaasyoulikeit.com) can combine Capital country with Long Island, the Hudson Valley and the Catskills on a 13-night fly-drive from £1,295pp, including flights, car hire and accommodation.

Getting there

New York is the obvious gateway. Flights from Heathrow are available with BA (ba.com), Virgin (virgin-atlantic.com), United (united.com), American (aa.com) and Delta (delta.com), and from Gatwick on Norwegian (norwegian.com). American and United also fly from Manchester, and United from Edinburgh, Glasgow and Birmingham. Northernmost New York State is easy to reach from Canada; BA, Air Canada and [Air Transat](http://airtransat.co.uk) (airtransat.co.uk) serve Toronto and Montreal from London.

Getting around

Besides the rail options from New York City to Albany and Niagara, Megabus offers low-cost links in the state. Manhattan to Albany typically costs \$15 (£9), with six departures a day. The end-to-end journey from Buffalo to New York costs \$30 and takes eight hours.

Fly-drive options abound. Bon Voyage (0800 316 3012, bon-voyage.co.uk) suggests a well-paced, 10-day Beautiful Upstate Journey. A package including flights, car hire and accommodation costs from £1,795pp.

The State's website is iloveny.com. Responsible Travel has a guide to New York State's smaller-scale tours, activities and accommodation that benefit communities and countryside (bit.ly/ResponsibleNYS).